

MARXIST-LENINIST STUDY

A Note on Mr. MBOYA'S 'SOCIALISM'

by
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'We will not allow ourselves to be caught by the magic of words. Most of the States speak of African socialism. Even Senghor speaks of African socialism.'

'If we are not careful the word "socialism" will be emptied of its meaning, and bourgeois systems of the most reactionary kind will be able to camouflage themselves under the sign of socialism.'

—President Modibo Keita, of Mali

SOCIALISM HAS TREMENDOUS popular appeal in Africa today. There are a number of important reasons for this, among which we may mention the following:

1. Socialism is the direct opposite and leading opponent of imperialism and its offspring, colonialism, against which we of Africa have been fighting and are still fighting today as our bitterest enemy. It was the great October Socialist revolution in Russia which struck the first shattering blow against imperialism in 1917, which opened the road to all the glorious victories of the Asian, African and Latin American peoples, which are still continuing and will go on until the last vestiges of colonialism have been destroyed. And it is still today the countries of the socialist camp which are the staunchest friends and supporters of the colonial and formerly colonial peoples in their hard struggle to complete their independence and overcome the terrible consequences of foreign rule.
2. Africans have seen and suffered from capitalism at work in their midst, with its ruthless exploitation of human labour, its criminal

disregard of the welfare, lives, health and interests of the people. We have not fought and sacrificed for freedom, merely in order to exchange black exploiters for white ones.

3. The great immediate need of all the African peoples, and especially the young independent states, is to overcome the technological, industrial and economic backwardness which imperialism has left us with—so that we may hold on to and strengthen our independence; so that we may raise our people's standards of living, health, education and happiness. We must catch up—rapidly, with giant's strides—with the advanced nations of the world. For centuries Africa has been the prey of alien conquerors, seeking and grabbing our natural and human resources—because we were backward. Conquest and colonialism have kept us backward. We must seize the chance to overcome that backwardness now, or our children will curse us for allowing them once again to be enslaved. And we can see with our own eyes, from the experience of the U.S.S.R., People's China, Vietnam, Korea and the socialist lands of East and Central Europe, that *only* socialism enables undeveloped economies rapidly to plan and attain a balanced, rational and massive expansion.
4. African societies have not, for the most part, developed powerful and well-entrenched bourgeois classes who could effectively resist socialism and socialist ideas. The capitalists in Africa have largely been foreigners, connected with or dependent on the colonial regimes. Hence, the patriotic anti-colonialist upsurge of the masses has had, and still has, a powerful anti-capitalist content. The foremost fighters for African liberation have been the working class, standard-bearer of socialist ideas, and their closest allies, the African peasants. The *African* peasant has, over huge areas, never adopted or been attracted by the system of private ownership of land, and therefore the socialist conception of common ownership is clear and understandable.
5. African countries are attaining their independence in the era of the disintegration of world capitalism and imperialism, of the swift advance of the socialist countries, socialist ideas and socialist movements, to a position of decisive importance and influence on an international scale. It is precisely this factor which gives African countries the opportunity to proceed directly from pre-capitalist to socialist societies, without having to pass through the degrading and dehumanising period of capitalist individualism, selfishness and exploitation, in which man becomes a wolf to his brother and profits by trampling others down into the mud.

These are some of the reasons for the magnetic appeal of socialism and socialist ideas for African workers, peasants, thinkers and patriots. It is difficult or impossible for any African statesman or leader to come out openly before the masses as a defender of capitalism and an opponent of socialism.

Unfortunately, however, most Africans for a variety of reasons arising out of the colonialist past, are not well informed about socialism. Various people therefore are able to put across the most misleading ideas under the label of 'socialism' or 'African socialism'—ideas which have nothing in common with either socialism or with African patriotism.

For example, Mr. Tom Mboya, Kenya Minister for Constitutional Affairs, writes an article entitled 'African Socialism' in the Uganda magazine *Transition* (March 1963). It would be fair to say that anyone reading this article in the hope of learning more about socialism will end up being even more confused than he was before he read it. Either Mr. Mboya does not understand what socialism is, or he does know but prefers capitalism, which he tries to sell to his readers under the label 'socialism'. He wraps everything up in such a fog of vague verbiage that it is difficult to find out exactly what, if anything, he is saying. Take this, for a start:

'When I talk of "African Socialism" I refer to those proven codes of conduct in the African societies which have, over the ages, conferred dignity on our people and afforded them security regardless of their station in life. I refer to universal charity which characterised our societies and I refer to the African's thought processes and cosmological ideas, which regard man, not as a social means, but as an end and entity in the society.'

Now we may admire many 'codes of conduct' in traditional African society, and we shall seek to preserve and build upon them in the New Africa. But it is absurd to take some traditional folkways, add to them 'security' (when did our people, one wonders, really enjoy security?), 'charity' (we want rights, not charity!), add some high-flown talk about 'African thought processes and cosmological ideas'—and call the result 'socialism'.

Socialism is a definite and specific system of ideas and society, based not upon the tribal past but the modern, highly organised and industrial future. The effect—if not the purpose—of this sort of vague word-spinning is to link 'socialism' with the past, not the future, and to confuse the reader.

Mr. Mboya goes on, however, to admit that socialism is not only an African idea, that its 'basic tenets . . . are universal and we are

either socialists or not at all.' Fine; but he then goes on to give a 'definition' of socialism which merely leads to confusion worse confounded:

'Socialism is a mental conditioning or an attitude of mind established in order to achieve rational relationship and harmony in the society.'

MISTAKEN CONCEPTION

It is worth dwelling on this formulation, because it is basic to a good deal of what is mistaken in Mr. Mboya's approach. 'In Africa,' he says, 'the belief that we are all sons (and daughters) of the soil has exercised tremendous influence on our social, economic and political relationships. Arising from this *belief* is the logic and practice of equality. . . . Also, arising from the same *belief* is the communal ownership of the vital means of life—the land.' (My emphasis.—T. A.)

In these formulations the writer is confusing cause and effect. He imagines that African societies held the land in common because of some special African 'belief' or *theory* of social relationships. Now, it is perfectly true that traditional African concepts on the organisation of society have many noble features and have much in common with socialism. One cannot quarrel much with Mr. Mboya when he writes:

'Laziness was not tolerated and there were appropriate social sanctions and ethics to encourage hard work and industriousness. Poverty existed but it was not due to man exploiting man. The social, cultural and economic gap was not great. . . . There was equality of opportunity. The acquisitive instinct . . . was tempered by a sense of togetherness and rejection of graft and meanness. . . .'

But, one must ask, where did these good ideas and practices come from? They did not arise out of the air, but out of the way of life of the African people, the way in which they organised themselves to make a living in the hard struggle against Nature. As Karl Marx put it in one of those illuminating flashes of profound wisdom which has placed generations of socialists so deeply in his debt:

'It is not man's consciousness which determines his social being; but on the contrary, it is his social being which determines his consciousness.'

In other words it was the communist character of traditional African society, based on the common ownership of the means of production (the land), which explains the communist content of much of traditional African social thought and practice—not the other

way round. And this common ownership did not arise out of any exceptional African 'belief' about land ownership. It arose because the techniques and instruments of agricultural production had not developed beyond the point where an individual or a family could produce more from the land than was necessary for their own needs. Therefore there was no conceivable purpose in a man owning, or having the use of, more land than he himself could cultivate.

Nor was there any basis or purpose in the exploitation of man by man. For exploitation only becomes possible when productive techniques are efficient enough for a man to produce a *surplus* over and above his own essential requirements of life and reproduction.

What is the essence of exploitation? It is that one man is able to produce such a surplus—and that surplus is *appropriated* by another without equivalent compensation. When productive techniques are at such a low level of development as to make this impossible there can, for example, be no slavery—the crudest and primary form of exploitation, of which all other forms, including capitalist exploitation of wage-labour, are mere refinements and elaborations. If a slave's full time and energies are taken up in labour to produce food and shelter for himself and his family there is no point in *having* a slave, and there are no slaves. If a tribe or community defeats another in war under such conditions, the losers are either put to death or absorbed as equal working members of the victorious community—otherwise they would be just so many useless mouths to feed. It is only with the further development of the techniques and instruments of production to the stage where a surplus can be produced that it becomes possible and profitable to introduce a slave system.

So the socialist consciousness of which Mr. Mboya speaks was certainly present in traditional African society—to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the degree of development towards slave or feudal systems present in each particular part of Africa—which itself depended on the degree of technical development attained in that part of our continent. But that socialist consciousness did not depend on abstract theories: it grew naturally out of the actual conditions of life and labour in those societies. 'Laziness was not tolerated', for the simple reason that if everyone did not work there would not be enough to eat; Africans *had* to apply the socialist principle: 'He who does not work, neither shall he eat.' There was no exploitation because exploitation cannot exist without surplus value.

This socialist consciousness will help to provide favourable conditions for the development of modern socialist societies in Africa ;

but such societies will have to be built consciously by clear-headed and determined fighters for socialism, who understand the necessity for unremitting struggle against capitalist institutions, practices and ideas.

Mr. Mboya shows his failure to grasp the essential principle that 'Man's social being determines his consciousness' once again, when he writes that Africans have at least tempered 'the acquisitive instinct *which is largely responsible for the vicious excesses and exploitation under capitalism*'. He misses the whole point. It is precisely *the capitalist system itself* which is 'responsible for' and which fosters and gives rise to the money-mad individualism, greed and disregard of human life and welfare which is characteristic of capitalism, and which one supposes he means by 'the acquisitive instinct'.

It is not that the individual capitalist himself is necessarily a bad and a wicked man, but that the whole system under which he lives teaches him that the highest good is his own enrichment and accumulation of wealth, regardless of how much suffering and death this process may cause others.

If Africans have thus far escaped this vicious and degrading outlook it is not because merely of some exceptional virtue and nobility inherent in our people—although we all like to feel we are better than others; it is because for historical reasons we have for the most part not undergone the phase of capitalist industrialism—and, with sound socialist leadership, one hopes we never shall.

And one should add that it is not only we Africans who have gone through the phase of simple tribal communism with its noble virtues of unselfishness, social consciousness, democracy, equality and refusal to tolerate idlers and parasites. Historical science and research tell us that *all* human societies everywhere have gone through this stage of development, even though some of them are much further removed from it in time than ourselves.

DON'T IDEALISE THE PAST

Africans still have a fairly close connection and continuing relationship with the traditions of common ownership, lack of class differentiation, social consciousness rather than individualism, and freedom from exploitation which Africa knew before the intrusion of the colonialists, which irrevocably changed our destiny and the course of our history. And, as suggested above, modern African socialists should cherish these sound traditions and build upon them for the future.

At the same time, however, we should avoid the temptation to idealise our past, to forget its negative features, or imagine that we can solve our problems in this nuclear and space-travel epoch by returning to some mythical 'golden age'. The early period of tribal communism had certain features in common with modern communism and socialism. But it has vital differences as well. In some ways modern communism is the opposite and final negation of the old. After a long historical period of development through inner conflicts, human society is returning to its original communist form—a classless, non-exploitive society of equals. But whereas ancient communism was a 'sharing' of the barest *scarcity*, so severe that there was nothing over for greed and selfishness to appropriate, modern communism is a sharing of the abundant *wealth*, health and culture to which science and industry have given us the key.

This means that African socialists and communists must not look nostalgically to the static rural, tribal and agricultural Africa of the past. They must look forward to and work with the utmost energy for the dynamic, urban and rural industrialised and electrified Africa of the future.

In his article in *Transition*, Mr. Mboya proceeds to outline a number of economic reforms for Kenya 'under the guidance of our socialist tradition'. He gives first priority to agricultural reform 'since over three-quarters of Kenya's population depends on agriculture', with the objects of expanding employment and providing more food, to export more crops for foreign exchange, to accelerate rural development, and 'to lay the foundation for industrialisation by processing raw materials for export abroad and for the East African market'. It is not possible in this article to examine in detail the various proposals put for agricultural reform; for the most part they are sound enough and in harmony with the progressive policy of KANU—although one would have liked to see more explanation of and more emphasis placed on Agricultural Co-operatives and land reform.

However, Mr. Mboya proceeds to say: 'Agricultural development alone is not enough. The development of trade and industry must be accorded second highest priority. . . .' It is not only in the order of these 'priorities', but above all in the detailed proposals which he submits under this head, which furnish the clearest illustration of his strange understanding of 'socialism'.

'Our government,' he starts off promisingly enough, 'should participate directly in the vital industrial undertakings.' But how is it to do this?

It should 'provide funds for training local entrepreneurs'. What, you may ask, is an *entrepreneur*? It is a trick word used by bourgeois economists, meaning 'capitalists'. I suspect that Mr. Mboya uses it because he believes most of his readers will not know what it means, and because he knows they would object to the use of public funds for the training of capitalists, or 'to enable them to participate in industry'.

Secondly, 'our government should establish a Development Bank to offer loans to industries and to organise the flow of foreign capital'. In other words, Mr. Mboya's 'socialist' plan consists in *helping* local and foreign capitalists with loans. He also thinks that 'industries' (by which he obviously means privately-owned industries) should be helped by the government with 'services like research, etc.'.

'Lastly . . . the government should *stimulate private investment* . . .' in industry and trade. It is true that he adds, 'while at the same time offering the wage-earners and primary producers security of income and employment'.

There are two major criticisms to be made of this economic blueprint, put forward in an article allegedly dealing with 'African Socialism'. In the first place it is entirely inadequate. The people of Kenya have struggled and sacrificed in a hard struggle for many bitter years to win an African Government, and having won it they will expect, not miracles overnight, but immediate, vigorous and visible steps to restore the land to the people, to lay the basis for powerful industrial advance and to liquidate the colonialist heritage of backwardness, poverty and ignorance. The plan as explained by Mr. Mboya does nothing to accomplish these things. True, he may object that this is a practical, immediate plan for the interim period, leading to greater things in the future. But he does not say so; indeed, he puts forward his programme in a manner and in a context which can only lead his reader to conclude that it is meant to be a socialist programme. And this brings us to the second major criticism of this article—

For there is one thing this programme most definitely is not—and that is a programme for socialism. In order to appreciate this point thoroughly, we must go back and consider exactly what socialism—whether 'African', 'Asian', 'European' or anywhere else—IS.

WHAT IS SOCIALISM?

Let us be quite blunt and straightforward. Socialism is *not* 'a mental conditioning'. It is not 'an attitude of mind'. It is a quite definite

ideology, based on well-known principles. Let us, briefly, restate a few of those principles:

1. Socialists are opposed to the capitalist system of production, based on private ownership of the means of production—the factories, mines, land, etc., and the exploitation of man by man.
2. **Socialists work for a socialist system, based upon the common ownership of the means of production.**
3. The capitalists will not voluntarily relinquish power and ownership. Therefore it is necessary for the workers to organise as a class for the overthrow of capitalist class rule and the conquest of state power, in order to abolish the exploitation of man by man and build a classless society, with equal rights and opportunities for all.

If one accepts and works for these aims, one is a socialist. If one doesn't, one is not. And if one judges by his article, Mr. Mboya, whatever else he may be, is no socialist!

He apparently feels that the 'definitions' referred to above are pretty inadequate, for he attempts yet another, this time 'in the general concept':

'Socialism stands for equality of opportunity, security of income and employment, equality before the law, the rule of law, individual freedom, universal franchise, state regulation of economic life, state control of vital means of production and distribution, etc.'

Here, in fact, is the core of the matter. Let us examine with care this last of his 'definitions'.

We may all agree, whether we are socialists or not, that such things as 'equality' of opportunity and legal rights, 'security', the rule of law, freedom and democracy, are all very desirable things. Even supporters of capitalism do not (or dare not) oppose them. In fact the whole nub of the argument between, on the one hand, socialists and communists, and, on the other, the supporters of capitalism or 'private enterprise', is precisely this—*which system is better able to provide the people with security, freedom, democracy and a good life?*

We socialists and communists say capitalism cannot provide these things. We say that there can be *no* security while an unplanned, capitalist economy throws, at any moment, millions into unemployment and crises of 'overproduction'. We say that there can be no true equality while the rich class has the privilege of exploiting our

labour power and waxing fat on unearned incomes derived from our sweat. We say political democracy is a fraud as long as *economic* power is concentrated in the hands of the few who own the means of production.

Therefore the vital and central issue is: who owns the means of production? Either it is the working masses, expressing themselves through their own state. Or else it is the private owners—who, because of their private ownership, will really control the state itself, a capitalist state.

Mr. Mboya begs this crucial question and leaves it unanswered.

He speaks, not of public *ownership*, but of a state *control* of 'vital means of production and distribution, etc.'. By using this formulation he *blurs* and *obliterates* the crucial distinction between capitalism and socialism. Ownership is *not* the same as 'control'. It is impossible to run a modern economy without a certain degree of state control over vital industries. Thus, even in the United States of America, the home of capitalist 'free enterprise', the state, to some extent, controls such matters as labour regulations, prices, etc. Not so long ago President Kennedy told the American steel bosses not to put up their prices, because of the inflationary effect it would have on the economy. Yet no one in his right senses would claim that the United States is socialist or even at present moving in a socialist direction!

In Britain, state control goes even further, and certain important sectors of the British economy have even been nationalised—such as the railways and the coal mines. But by no stretch of the imagination could the United Kingdom, whether under a Tory or a Labour government, be described as a socialist society.

The essence of the question is twofold:

First, socialism means *public ownership*. Any system of 'control' that leaves ownership in the hands of private capitalists is not socialism but a form of regulated *state capitalism*, designed not to benefit the workers and the toiling masses, but to exploit them more efficiently. The capitalists themselves are turning increasingly to this type of 'control'—in order to keep the system going and to facilitate militarisation of society and preparations for war.

Socialist *planning* is impossible while private capitalists own the means of production. The capitalists produce in accordance with the anarchic ups and downs of the market, the so-called laws of supply and demand, not in accordance with the needs of the people for a better life and a better future. Capitalist production is designed for private profit, not for the public benefit. Nothing can alter this state

of affairs until the main means of production are taken out of the hands of capitalists and placed under common ownership.

Second, when we talk about 'state' ownership or control, we must ask: '*Whose state?*' Socialism means that the state itself must cease to be a dictatorship of the capitalist minority. The state of the exploiters must be broken up and replaced by a true democracy, a dictatorship of the working class. A state dominated by exploiters and headed by believers in capitalism cannot build socialism or inspire the creative energy of the masses. 'Nationalisation' of certain industries and services by a capitalist state must *not* be confused with socialism. In South Africa the state controls certain vital industrial undertakings as steel (ISCOR) and coal-derived oil and petrol (SASOL). The railways, airways and harbours are *state-owned* and operated. But no sane African could claim that control or even ownership by the criminal apartheid state has anything at all in common with socialism.

Turn back now and reconsider the practical economic proposals put forward under the label of 'African socialism' and you will see that they contain no socialism at all. It is a plan for training indigenous capitalists and helping them to set up in business to exploit their fellow-Africans. It is a plan to attract foreign and local investors, who will only be interested in making profits for themselves and not at all in advancing Kenya on the path to economic development and socialism. It is a plan for capitalist development in Kenya.

There are two main objections to this plan: firstly it is misleading and deceptive to tell the people that this is socialism when it is nothing of the sort. And secondly that it will not lead the people of Kenya to their goals of defeating poverty, disease, backwardness and other consequences of colonialism nearly as rapidly and purposefully as a genuinely socialist plan would do.

'INTELLECTUAL IMPERIALISM'

We Africans have had enough, and more than enough, of self-appointed 'advisers', some of them well-meaning, others by no means so, who come out to Africa from abroad to tell us how to run our own affairs. Many of them are poorly informed about African conditions, problems and aspirations, and the motives of some of them are by no means above suspicion. We want and need to study the techniques and experiences of other peoples in other continents. But we want to choose and apply this knowledge ourselves. Then at

least, if we make mistakes, they will be our own mistakes and we shall not have to blame anyone else for them ; that is what is meant by freedom.

Mr. Mboya plays upon this widespread and justified feeling when he warns his readers against what he calls 'intellectual imperialism' and 'foreign slogans'. 'Let us go abroad,' he writes, 'to ask for loans and technical skills, not for ideals and ideologies.'

And he cautions his readers against 'the blueprints of the West or the East'.

There would appear to be a few traps or land-mines hidden under these not entirely ingenuous formulations.

In the first place, we must be very careful to distinguish between the *principles* and *ideology* of socialism, which are universal, and concrete *application* and plans ('blueprints' if you like) of these principles to the special circumstances of any given country, which must be local and specific.

If we are talking about principles and ideology then there is no such thing as 'Eastern' or 'Western' or 'African' socialism. There is only socialism. Just as there is no such thing as 'Eastern' mathematics or 'European' astronomy.

But, since socialism is not a mere abstraction but living practice, the precise path to socialism will differ in detail according to the special historical and national factors of each country, which naturally vary from one region to another.

One thing, however, is certain: the charting of the specific path towards socialism in any country can only be successfully accomplished by those who have mastered the universal science of socialism itself.

Mr. Mboya muddles this simple truth when he tries to foster the idea that there are different varieties of socialism.

'When I talk of socialist attitudes,' he says, '*those of us who have grown up under the intellectual climate of the Western world will no doubt be thinking of socialism of the Western type.*' He adds, with an ill-concealed sneer, that there are, 'of course', others who will be thinking in terms of '*a Marxian type of socialism*'. (My emphases.—T. A.)

What is this 'socialism of the Western type' of which Mr. Mboya writes? (He includes himself in those of 'us' who 'have grown up under the intellectual climate of the Western world'.) It would seem from the woolly formulations and the deliberate avoidance of the crucial issues of socialist theory and practice that he has in mind the so-called 'socialism' of the British Labour Party which flourished

under the fatal leadership of men like the late Mr. Gaitskell. But, as Africans who have studied modern British political developments should understand very well, this was not socialism at all, but a wretched compromise born out of the apparently incurable tendency of British Labour leaders to collaborate in the maintenance of British imperialism under the banner of a shoddy pretence at socialism. So far from advancing the cause of socialism, this type of leadership and theory has done more to discredit it than the capitalists themselves.

Britain has had three Labour governments—all of them trying to save what they could of the British empire. There have been a number of similar (social democratic) governments in Scandinavian countries and pre-war Germany. Not a single one of these governments has taken any of these countries one serious step nearer to socialism. Instead of introducing socialism, they have merely been content to administer the capitalist state and to maintain its essential institutions intact.

The only countries in the world which have introduced socialism are those in which the working class, under the leadership of Marxist-Leninist parties, have destroyed the capitalist state, replaced it with a state under the rule of the workers, placed the main industries under public ownership and mobilised the people to work consciously for the socialist transformation of society.

Thus, there are not various 'brands' of socialism. In the brief century that has passed since Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels founded the modern communist movement, Marxism has vanquished all other, non-scientific theories of socialism and proved itself the only correct and scientific theory of socialism.

In attempting to smuggle the so-called 'Western' deviations from and revisions of socialist thought into Africa, it is indeed Mr. Mboya, and those misled people who think like him, who are, consciously or unconsciously, guilty of 'intellectual imperialism'. For this Western socialism is nothing more or less than an attempt to introduce imperialist ideology and apologies for colonialism into the clear mainstream of socialist thought and consciousness.

'African socialism' is either the conscious and well-informed work of African socialists to apply the correct and universally-valid principles of scientific socialism—Marxism-Leninism—to practical African conditions—or it is not socialism at all.

The essence of this question is expressed clearly in *The Road to South African Freedom*, the programme of the South African Communist Party:

'It is true that the precise paths of the African peoples towards socialism will differ from those of peoples of other continents, due to differences of national tradition and history, to the long period of colonialist domination which, amongst other factors, has prevented the development of African societies along the same lines as those in Europe and Asia. But the whole of international experience has proved beyond any shadow of doubt, that the main truths of Marxism-Leninism are fully applicable to countries in every stage of social development. The only road towards a socialist and communist future is that indicated by Marxism. The innumerable attempts, in many parts of the world, to propound or practise "non-Marxist socialism", or to "revise", "modify" and "improve" Marxism-Leninism, have one and all ended in disaster and betrayal of the working class.'

By a socialist society we mean one which approaches nearer a state of affairs in which each gives according to his ability and receives according to his needs.

—Jomo Kenyatta, Prime Minister of Kenya and President of the Kenya African National Union.